

Community gets input on closing Credit View

By Bill Rea

Although Peel District School Board officials are stressing nothing has been finalized, there seems to be a general acceptance that Credit View Public School is moving toward being closed.

And there are those in the community who don't like it.

There were about 60 on hand for a public meeting Monday night at Belfountain Public School to gather input and comments on the possibility.

The Board is currently involved in a Pupil Accommodation Review (PAR) involving five schools on the west side of town (Alloa, Alton, Belfountain, Caledon Central and Credit View). Trustee Stan Cameron said changes could be resulting from the process and he agreed they might not be easy to take. He stressed the main concern is what's in the best interest of the impacted students. It was also stressed many times at the meeting that the public input would be considered very seriously.

"This meeting is not easy," Associate Director of Education Scott Moreash told the audience. "Change comes hard."

Superintendent of Education Michael Logue said the PAR process started with an initial staff report, which the Board approved in December. Staff will be working on a final report, taking input from Monday's meeting into account, and he said that's slated to go before trustees Feb. 28. There will be a chance for members of the public to delegate before the Board March 22. The plan is currently for trustees to make a final decision April 12.

Logue said the problem they are trying to address stems from declining enrolment at Credit View. There are currently 81 students in the facility, that goes from junior kindergarten to Grade 8. There is one grade with only two students. The school has a Ministry of Education rated capacity of 104. Reduced enrolment puts restrictions on what programs can be offered at the school.

He also said there is excess space at other nearby schools, including Belfountain and Alton. As well, Logue said the Board has an obligation to be fiscally responsible in its operations.

Phillip Sousa, planning officer with the Board, said Credit View is the smallest of the five schools involved in the PAR, although in terms of enrolment and capacity, it rates highest among the five.

The Ministry rated capacity for the five schools combined is 1,789, and the enrolment, as of September 2016, was 1,132, or a little more than 63 per cent.

Although the meeting was told various options were considered, Sousa said staff had determined the best way to go was to close Credit View, aiming at September 2018, or earlier if staffing timelines permit. Students from JK to Grade 6 would go either to Alloa or Belfountain, depending on where they live, and some of the Belfountain kids would be moved to Alton. Grade 7 and 8 student living south of King Street would go to Alloa and those north of King would go to Caledon Central.

One of the points made was the low enrolment at Credit View limits the chances for social interacting for the students within their peer groups.

Sousa also said that of the five schools involved in PAR, Credit View has the highest maintenance and construction needs.

If things go according to plan, Sousa said Alloa will be filled beyond capacity in September '18, but a lot of those students live in Brampton and adjustments to boundaries should straighten that out.

Although the recommendation is to close the school, the Board currently has no plans to rid itself of the building or property.

Randy Wright, controller of planning and accommodation support services for the Board, said while there are deficiencies at Credit View, Caledon Central is in good shape. There is a long list of projects to be worked on at Belfountain, including to the office and reception areas, as well as the foyer. Work also needs to be done in the gym, including the stage floor and the storage area under the stage. The room could also use better lighting and a sound system, he said. The plan is to also put white boards in all the classrooms. There might also be asphalt touch-ups and landscaping work outside.

In terms of staffing, Moreash said no teacher is going to lose his or her job because of this process. Some of the teachers would be moving with the students, but not all.

One man in the audience complained the area is going to lose teachers, but Moreash that might not be the case. The man also said every teacher he had spoken too was afraid to talk to parents for fear of losing their jobs. He was upset that the Board is talking about closing a school, but haven't figured out where the teachers are going to go.

Moreash observed the PAR has specific procedures dealing with staffing, and the Board works with the teachers' unions. He added the teachers at Credit View know what's going on.

He added there are only eight teachers at the school. Some might want to stay until the end, and others would want to move on sooner.

?I have no way of predicting that,? he said.

One woman suggested delaying things a year, in order to give the Credit View community a chance to give the school a proper closing.

There were others who expressed disappointment. One woman pointed out Credit View is the best utilized of the five school, yet it's in line to close.

Some parents indicated they might want their kids moved sooner. One woman was worried about a youngster finishing Grade 7 at Credit View, then moving to Caledon Central for Grade 8 then going to high school, going through three schools in as many years. Moreash said that could be taken under consideration.

There were some people who wondered why the enrolment at Credit View had declined.

One woman said she tried to enrol her child there, but she needed before and after-school programs. She worked hard to set them up, but she didn't think she was getting much support from the school. Her child ended up in school in Georgetown.

?It was almost a barrier to get into Credit View,? she said.

Wright told her there hasn't been any significant development in the Credit View area, adding the decline in enrolment is characteristic with what's been noticed in other places in Peel. He added Credit View has a problem with size, being the smallest K-to-8 school in the system. He also said it's the oldest of the five schools and not in great shape.

There were also questions as to why a new Alloo school was built, but not a new Credit View.

One man complained about \$14 million that was spend at Alloo.

?We're losing a school while you're spending \$14 million south,? he charged. ?We're trying to save our school.?

He added none of the Credit View parents think the school's in bad shape.

A woman said it would only take about 40 students to bring Credit View to capacity.

?We don't feel like youre hearing us,? she said.

Wright said they build schools where the numbers support it, adding the Town of Caledon keeps the Board informed as to where development is going. ?Right now, the students just aren't there,? he said.

He added they don't draw school boundaries based on municipal boarders, but based on where the students are.

There was a suggestion that the school be used as some sort of community centre. Wright said they would entertain suggestions on alternate uses.

He also said Credit View is too small to be used as a junior high school.

Coordinating Superintendent Jeff deFreitas said the final staff report will consider the comments made at the meeting and address them. He added the April 12 board meeting will be open to the public.

?I'll bring CITY?TV,? one man said.